

MISCELLANEOUS.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA.

Mr. A. Kampmeier is entitled to my sincere thanks for his lexicographic note on "Joseph of Arimathæa" in *The Open Court* of last December. He compels me to discuss at greater length the meaning of the proper name Arimathæa in our Gospels, which I am inclined to think cannot be determined by applying to the lexicon alone.

As soon as I became convinced of the unhistorical character of the Joseph of Arimathæa pericope, the question arose whether that account was altogether legendary or based to some extent, at least, upon facts. I preferred to recognize in Joseph a real person who has been instrumental in securing a burial for Jesus. The pericope is clearly of Palestinian origin and, therefore, belongs to the first century. I doubt whether at that time a Palestinian Christian could and would invent the name of the man who buried Jesus.

Arimathæa is unquestionably the name of the place from which Joseph had come to Jerusalem. But it is well-nigh impossible to locate it in Palestine. For, on the one hand, it was not customary for Jews to modify their personal name by the name of their home town, notwithstanding the case of Jesus. The latter was called apparently Jesus of Nazareth first by his enemies who, in doing so, attempted to ridicule his messianic claims. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John i. 46). On the other hand, the Old Testament mentions not less than five different places which went by the name of Ramah. Thus, Arimathæa, if intended to denote one of them, would have been a very unsatisfactory way of identifying a person.

These premises suggested to me Joseph of Arimathæa may have been the official agent of the high priest in his dealings with Pontius Pilate. That idea is not a mere guess. For the high priests actually employed such diplomatic representatives. We read Acts xxiv. 1f: "After five days the high priest Ananias came down with certain elders, and with an orator, one Tertullus; and they informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him." Tertullus is evidently a Roman name; but the bearer of that name must have been a Jew by birth and by religion. Otherwise he could not have been affiliated with the high priest. As a native of Rome, he had adopted a Roman name. Jews even at that time liked to bear a name of the people among whom they lived. That is proved by the Apostle Paul, whose Jewish name was Saul, while outside of Palestine he called himself Paul.

But it might be objected: Why should the priests of Jerusalem need the services of a middleman who commanded the language of Rome? For the governors of the eastern provinces spoke Greek. That question overlooks in

the first place the fact that there are always two, if not more, parties to any business transaction. In the given instance, the two parties were the Roman governor and the high priest. Assuming Pontius Pilate to have been a Greek scholar, we must in addition prove that the high priest or his associates spoke that language.

As a matter of fact, during that period, a person speaking Greek could travel as far as India and find everywhere people with whom he could converse and do business in Greek. For Alexander the Great and his successors had taken care to establish at all points of strategic and commercial importance Greek colonies. But those colonies never succeeded in supplanting the languages of the conquered nations. Wherever a country has been conquered by a foreign race, the population belonging to the soil, if sufficiently numerous, has always retained its language even if the invader represented a much higher civilization.

In the case of the Jews in Palestine, the inborn resistance of the people against the exchange of their native tongue for Greek was strengthened by their religion. The superiority of their religion as well as their less laudable religious prejudices rendered them inaccessible to Greek influences. One might indeed imagine the priests, who formed the Jewish aristocracy, to have been more open-minded and accessible to Greek culture. They enjoyed leisure and wealth. But these two factors alone have never been the cause of literary activity and achievements. Moreover, the servants of the temple were always dependent for their income upon the good will of their co-religionists. This forced them to foster the most conservative tendencies of their countrymen. Gentile learning would have discredited the priests in the eyes of the whole populace.

The Jews of the *diapara* occupied, of course, an exceptional position. They had no choice, but had to learn and use the language of the people among whom they had settled and among whom they were compelled to make their living. But the Jewish synagogue had taken care of them. Their children were instructed in the sacred language of their fathers. They expressed their religious thought in Hebrew. When they came to Jerusalem, they did not desire the priests to address them in Greek but to listen to the speech of the patriarchs, of Moses, and of the prophets. And the self-interest of the priests demanded that such feelings should be praised and confirmed rather than weakened by any compromises with the heathen world. For such weighty reasons the priests at Jerusalem from the highest to the lowest were innocent of the knowledge of any foreign language. Hebrew was quite good enough for them.

Yet Pilate by chance was familiar with Greek, and therefore the priests did not need the services of a Latin Hebrew interpreter but only of a man who commanded Hebrew and Greek. As a matter of fact, Greek became the language of the Roman Empire after the capital had been removed to Constantinople. But before that time, the official language of the empire was Latin; and no man could expect to become governor of any province simply because he happened to know the language spoken in that province. All the high offices at the disposal of the government went to friends and favorites of the emperor, and these favored men were expected to return as millionaires from their provinces. Of Pilate we know that "the unusual length of time during which he held office was, in accordance with the policy of Tiberius,

based on the opinion that governors who had already enriched themselves, would be better for the people than new ones whose avarice was yet unsatisfied" (*Dict. of the Bible*). Thus our information about him being very scanty, we cannot ascribe linguistic accomplishments to him which he needed neither at home nor in his province.

But all members of the better class of Romans are supposed to have spoken Greek as well as Latin. If that were so, how could we account for the total extinction of all knowledge of Greek at Rome and in Italy after the separation from the eastern provinces? Even the Church had forgotten Greek; and it was not until the age of the Renaissance that Greek literature, including the New Testament writings, etc., became accessible to the Western theologians. As a matter of fact, the average Roman was fully conscious of belonging to a race of world-conquerors. There was no incentive for undergoing the hard grind of mastering any foreign language. If anybody wanted to enjoy his intercourse and conversation, he had to do it through the medium of Latin. Only people of literary gifts and ambitions would study Greek. It was fashionable to send the boys to Greek teachers. But the fruits of such an instruction cannot have been superior to the results achieved in our colleges in their foreign language departments. The Epigrams of Martial show that clearly enough. Among his 1534 epigrams, there are just six in which a few Greek words are used. The famous Sixth Satire of Juvenal bears witness to the same effect. The poet attacks among others a lady who likes to speak Greek. He says of her: "Omnia Graece, quum sit turpe magis nostris nescire Latine" (verses 184f), and: "Non est hic sermo pudicus in vetula" (verses 193f). If a Roman of great literary ability thought so about Greek, how much more would the average Roman politician spurn the very thought of acquiring a knowledge of Greek to be enabled to govern any province!

But does not the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans demonstrate how well known Greek was at Rome? That letter proves only two things. First, St. Paul could not write an epistle in Latin. Second, among the early Christians at Rome were people who understood Greek. Rome under the emperors was in many respects similar to our big American cities. It attracted constantly new immigrants from all parts of the world. They came there as prisoners of war, as slaves, as adventurers, and merchants. All those new arrivals acquired as soon as possible such a knowledge of Latin as they needed for their work and business; but they retained the knowledge of their mother tongue as a matter of course. Their children born and raised within the walls of Rome, however, would grow up as full-fledged Romans, speaking by preference the Roman language. They would imbibe the pride of Rome and despise even the language of their parents. Thus, the Christian church at Rome spoke Greek only during the short, transitory period from the first to the second generation.

For all these reasons, we may assume confidently that Pontius Pilate did not speak Greek. But even if he was able to use it, he would not have done so in official business. The majesty of Rome and his own dignity insisted that all affairs of state should be transacted in Latin. If the high priest had any complaint to make or favor to ask, he had to do so in Latin. That rule held good all over the Roman world. It was the conquered nation which had to address the victor in his language, not the victor's task to learn the tongue of the conquered nation. In accordance with that rule the sons of vanquished kings and chieftains were taken to Rome to be given a Roman education before

they were permitted to return to their native land and enter upon their inheritance. The rulers allied with Rome were eager to send their children to the imperial city for the same purpose. Herod the Great spoke in all probability Latin. Else he would hardly have been a friend of Augustus. Of his sons we know for sure that they all studied at Rome. One of them, Antipater the son of Salome, had become so proficient in Latin that he afterward pleaded his own cause before the emperor while Archelaos employed Nicolaos as his attorney (Jos., *Ant.*, XVII, 9, 5f).

In view of these facts, we cannot escape the conclusion that Joseph of Arimathæa, because he went to Pilate and asked him a favor, must have spoken Latin. This conclusion compels us to look more closely at the possible meaning of Arimathæa. For Ramah in Palestine, whichever of the five places going by that name it might have been, is out of the question as the seat of a school for Latin.

There is no room for doubt as to the meaning ascribed to the word by the original translator from Aramaic into Greek. He was sure it denoted a town in Palestine. For, otherwise, he would have given us the Greek name of the city. But if Ramah and Roma were both written with Hebrew letters, the two words would spell alike RMH. For at the age of Christ, vowels were not indicated in Hebrew words by special signs; and the final H simply indicates the feminine gender. In the Aramaic period, Rama had become Rima. Still, if the *scriptio defectiva* was used, the two names Rama, or Rima, and Roma would be spelled alike. But even if, according to the *scriptio plena*, the I in Rima was expressed by the Hebrew letter Yodh and the O in Roma by Waw, there was a fair chance of mistaking the one word for the other, for the head of both letters is the same. They differ only in the length of their necks. Both are slender and straight. If the manuscript had suffered much or if the neck of the Waw had been only a faint line from the beginning, the word intended to signify Roma could easily be read to denote Rima. The very word Romah is, by the way, a Hebrew word, used in Mic. ii. 3 as an adverb. It means "pride," or "haughtiness." That such a meaning would appeal to the Jews as a proper expression of the character of Rome is superfluous to state.

Consequently, in spite of Mr. Kampmeier's kind information, I have to repeat here what I suggested in my paper of last October. Arimathæa, for general reasons, must be and, on lexicological considerations, may be accepted as the Aramaic form of the name of the ancient mistress of the world.

WM. WEBER.

ST. CATHARINE OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR.¹

[OUR FRONTISPIECE.]

St. Catharine of Alexandria, Virgin and Martyr, was the daughter of a rich and noble chieftain who lived toward the end of the third century and was believed by some to have been the son of the Emperor Constantine. He was King of Armenia and by his marriage with a princess of Cyprus became king of that island, and founded the city of Fama Costa, now called Famagosta.

After the marriage a baby girl was born to them, who as she grew became

¹ Transcribed for *The Open Court* almost word for word from an ancient manuscript in the British Museum, by Katharine M. Langford. With some additions from the Abbotsford edition of the *Life of St. Katharine*.